Culture Shock: Securing the Bomb is Hard To Do

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Hundreds of organizations throughout the world, from secret directorates within national armed forces to university engineering departments have the responsibility of keeping nuclear weapons or nuclear materials safe from theft or misuse. How well can they do this critical job? Are there legal requirements for certain measurable security standards? How do they develop and maintain "best practices?" Will they be shut down or have their nuclear materials confiscated if poor security is proven?

As highlighted by a recent landmark report, much depends on the quality and strength of the "security culture," within these organizations and the states that host them. The Center for International Trade and Security at the University of Georgia released its report "Nuclear Security Culture: The Case of Russia," in December 2004. The report asserts that even after more than a decade of technical and financial assistance from the West to improve the security of its nuclear weapons and materials, "Russia's nuclear sector will continue to require not only technological innovation, but also the cultivation of knowledgeable, skilled, and motivated personnel who are trained to use modern equipment and adhere to best practices." This is because as the report makes abundantly clear money and technology are not enough to produce good security. The quality of the "human factor" is key.

While Russia is the subject of the report, its basic conclusions are true around the world. In the era of "super terrorism" effective security cultures are critical to national and global security. As the report states "security culture, is a concept that encompasses a set of managerial, organizational, and other arrangements. Security culture connotes not only the technical proficiency of the people entrusted with security, but also their willingness and motivation to follow established procedures, comply with regulations, and take the initiative when unforeseen circumstances arise."

The report breaks new ground and exceeds its two primary objectives of further developing the concept of security culture and suggesting a comprehensive plan for building such a model within an organization. It provides the most comprehensive treatment of the issue to date and, using its thorough analysis of the Russian case, identifies clear actions that that can be taken to build a strong security culture in that nation and others.

The importance of this reports message cannot be overstated. Creating strong security cultures will require the commitment of resources, trained personnel and effective administrative and regulatory procedures that are difficult for many states to sustain. In

general, even the strictest security measures are vulnerable to forces and instabilities of the societies in which they operate. The many examples of security weaknesses and attempts to improve them at the national, facility and individual levels in Russia provided in the report make this especially clear.

Even when effective measures are in place, security can never be perfect. Moreover, there are presently no binding global nuclear material security standards or authority empowered to confirm that high standards are being implemented. The quality of security and accounting for nuclear weapons and materials varies greatly and is largely at the discretion of each state where these materials exist.

Given this unsettling reality "Nuclear Security Culture: The Case of Russia," makes a vital contribution to the literature and practice of nuclear security. It offers ten practical recommendations for Russian leaders and others to consider for improving nuclear security in Russia and four for how the international community can assist this effort in Russia and strengthen nuclear security culture across the globe. Two of the reports appendices provide powerful tools for designing actual programs and procedures that would benefit security at nuclear facilities. These are a model training curriculum to help managers begin the arduous task of nurturing security culture within their organizations a generic evaluation methodology to enable them measure their progress toward a healthy security culture.

The success of this report was assisted by the credentials and experience of the authors and contributors, several of whom have been working for many years directly and in conjunction with the U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration with officials and facility operators in Russia to improve security conditions. Peer reviewers included several prominent U.S. and Russian experts who have worked tirelessly to improve global nuclear security. All those with the responsibility and desire to prevent the unauthorized or malignant use of nuclear weapons and materials will benefit greatly from this report.